

FLFI.04.065 Philosophical Perspectives on the Naturalistic Explanation of Religious Belief

2016/2017 spring full-time

Faculty/Department	Department of Philosophy (HVFI01)
Amount of credits (1 ECTS=26 hours)	3 ECTS
Duration in semesters	1
Final assessment	differentiated (A, B, C, D, E, F, not present)
Syllabus credits	3 ECTS
Lecturers	Uku Tooming (responsible), Riin Kõiv
Languages of instruction	English
Minimum number of attendants	3
Maximum number of attendants	20
Study levels	bachelor's studies, master's studies, doctoral studies
Target group and/or preconditions for participation	Everybody interested, preferably MA students
Forms of teaching and learning and no of hours	lectures: 2 seminars: 18 independent work (including e-learning): 58
Web-based learning	No
Study period (in weeks)	25-34

Objectives

The purpose of this course is to explore naturalist and materialist approaches, both historical and contemporary, to explaining religious belief and practice, and their broader implications for reductive understanding of cultural phenomena. Special focus will be on the questions of whether, and in which ways, the materialist understanding of human nature can ground cultural critique.

Learning outcomes

Upon the completion of the course the student:

- Is familiar with some central materialist explanations of religion from history of philosophy
- Has an overview of the contemporary naturalist explanations of religion
- Is able to analyze and compare different kinds of naturalist explanatory models and to recognize the historical continuity between them.
- Is able to evaluate the feasibility and implications of such explanatory attempts.

Brief description

The course will address the following topics: materialist and psychologistic explanations of religious belief in the tradition of European Enlightenment thought (e.g. French materialism, Ludwig Feuerbach), contemporary cognitive studies of religion and explanations of religion in evolutionary psychology (e.g. Dan Sperber and the epidemiology of religious representations, Pascal Boyer, Paul Bloom).

Groups

Mark Limit of attendants Lecturers

Schedule

lecture -
seminar -

Lecture materials and course home page

Compulsory study materials

D'Holbach, System of Nature
Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity.
Sperber, Explaining Culture

Boyer, Religion Explained
Schloss & Murray, The Believing Primate

Recommended study materials

Please ask the lecturer for additional reading list.

List of independent works and their instructions

Reading the texts and preparing for seminars.

Assessment methods and criteria

essay	<p>A - when the essay satisfies all the standard requirements of philosophical argumentative writing: the structure of the essay is clear and transparent, student has understood the topic and made use of the relevant literature, the essay evaluates the pros and cons of the views considered, the concepts are sufficiently explained, the essay forms an integrated whole (parts are in service of the whole).</p> <p>B - when one or two of aforementioned criteria is not fully satisfied, but the student nevertheless manages to convey his/her argument and thesis in clear and logical manner.</p> <p>C - when the essay doesn't satisfy a number of aforementioned criteria and this significantly affects the quality of the essay</p> <p>D - when there are problems to the extent that at some places it is quite difficult to understand what the author has in mind</p> <p>E - when there are pervasive problems with satisfying any of the aforementioned criteria, but the essay is still minimally satisfactory (for example, shows that the student has engaged with the topic and texts of the course in an analytic manner and has made an attempt to convey his thoughts coherently)</p> <p>F - when the essay doesn't even fulfil the minimal requirements</p>
-------	---

Requirements to be met for final assessment

Attending the seminars (it is allowed to miss two seminars).

To obtain final grade, the following is required

100% based on final essay.

Options for taking tests/exams at later date

To be arranged individually.